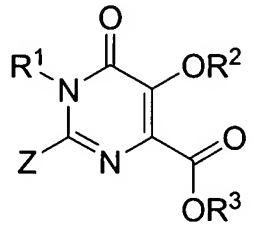
IN THE CLAIMS

The listing of the claims which follows replaces any and all prior versions and/or listings of the claims in the application.

1. (currently amended) A compound of formula (I) below, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



(I)

wherein

Z represents C_{2-6} alkynyl, aryl or heteroaryl, any of which groups may be optionally substituted;

R^1 represents C_{1-6} alkyl or aryl(C_{1-6})alkyl, either of which groups may be optionally substituted;

R^2 represents hydrogen; or C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{2-6} alkylcarbonyl, aryl, arylcarbonyl, heteroaryl, aryl(C_{1-6})alkyl or heteroaryl(C_{1-6})alkyl, any of which groups may be optionally substituted; and

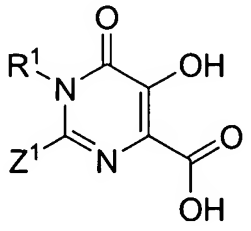
R^3 represents hydrogen, C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{3-7} heterocycloalkyl(C_{1-6})alkyl, di(C_{1-6})alkylamino(C_{1-6})alkyl, C_{2-6} alkylcarbonyloxy(C_{1-6})alkyl or C_{3-7} cycloalkoxycarbonyloxy(C_{1-6})alkyl;

provided that, when Z is unsubstituted phenyl, then R^1, R^2 and R^3 do not each simultaneously represent methyl.

~~for use in therapy.~~

2. (canceled)

3. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in claim 1 ~~claim 2~~ represented by formula (III) below:



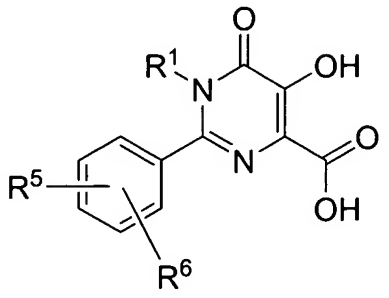
(III)

wherein

Z^1 represents optionally substituted aryl; and

R^1 is as defined in claim 1.

4. (original) A compound as claimed in claim 3 represented by formula (IV):



(IV)

wherein

R^1 is as defined in claim 1; and

R^5 and R^6 are each independently selected from hydrogen and a substituent group of formula (II):

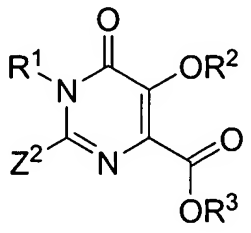
$$-X-R^4 \qquad (II)$$

in which

X is selected from -NH-SO_2-, -NH-SO_2-NH-, -CH_2-SO_2-, -SO_2-NH-, -NH-CO-NH-, -NH-CS-NH-, -NH-CO-O-, -NH-CO-, -CO-NH-, -NH-CO-NH-SO_2-, -NH-CO-NH-CO-, -O-, -S-, -SO-, -SO_2-, -NH-, -CH_2-, -CH_2O- and -CH_2S-; and

R^4 represents aryl, aryl(C_{1-6})alkyl, C_{3-7} cycloalkyl, C_{1-6} alkyl, heteroaryl(C_{1-6})alkyl, C_{3-7} heterocycloalkyl or C_{2-6} alkenyl, any of which groups may be optionally substituted.

5. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in <u>claim 1</u> ~~claim 2~~ represented by formula (X) below:



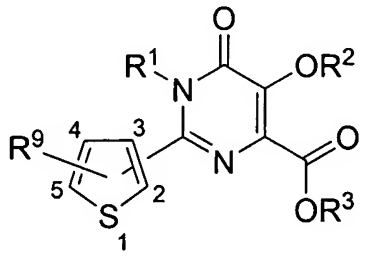
(X)

wherein

Z^2 represents optionally substituted heteroaryl; and

R^1, R^2 and R^3 are as defined in claim 1.

6. (original) A compound as claimed in claim 5 represented by formula (XI) below:



(XI)

wherein

R^1, R^2 and R^3 are as defined in claim 1; and

R^9 represents hydrogen or a group of formula (II) as defined in claim 4.

7. (currently amended) A compound, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, selected from the group consisting of: ~~Example Nos. 1 to 46, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.~~

2-[3-({[(2-chlorobenzyl)amino]carbonyl}amino)thien-2-yl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex1

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex2

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-(thiazol-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex3

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-(3-nitrothien-2-yl)-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex4

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-(3-aminothien-2-yl)-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex5

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-(3-bromothien-2-yl)-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex6

2-[3-(Acetylamino)thien-2-yl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex7

2-[3-(Benzoylamino)thien-2-yl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex8

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-(3-{[(2-methyl-1*H*-indol-3-yl)acetyl]amino}thien-2-yl)-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex9

2-(3-{[3-(2-Chlorophenyl)propanoyl]amino}thien-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex10

2-{3-[(Anilinocarbonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex11

2-(3-{[(1,1'-Biphenyl-2-ylamino)carbonyl]amino}thien-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex12

2-(3-{[(Benzhydrylamino)carbonyl]amino}thien-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex13

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-{3-[({[1-(1-naphthyl)ethyl]amino}-carbonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex14

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-[3-({[(2-phenylcyclopropyl)amino]-carbonyl}amino)thien-2-yl]-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex15

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-[3-({[(2-phenylethyl)amino]-carbonyl}amino)thien-2-yl]-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex16

5-Hydroxy-2-{3-[(isobutoxycarbonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex17

N^1-Benzyl-N^2-[2-(4-carboxy-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidin-2-yl)thiophen-3-yl]glycinamide, Ex18

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-(3-{[(2*E*)-3-phenylprop-2-enyl]amino}thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex19

2-(4-Carboxy-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidin-2-yl)-*N*-(3-phenylpropyl)thiophen-3-amine, Ex20

2-{3-[2-(Benzyloxy)ethyl]thien-2-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex21

2-{4-[({[(2-Chlorophenyl)sulfonyl]amino}carbonyl)amino]thien-3-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex22

2-{3-[({[(2-Chlorophenyl)sulfonyl]amino}carbonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex23

5-Hydroxy-2-(3-hydroxyphenyl)-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex24

2-(3-{[(1,1'-Biphenyl-2-ylamino)carbonyl]amino}phenyl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex25

2-[3-({[(3-Carboxyphenyl)amino]carbonyl}amino)phenyl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex26

2-{3-[(Benzylsulfonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex27

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-{3-[(2-naphthylsulphonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex28

2-(3-Formylthien-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex29

2-(3-Carboxythien-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex30

2-[3-({[2-(2-Chlorophenyl)ethyl]amino}carbonyl)thien-2-yl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex31

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-{3-[(*E*)-2-phenylethenyl]thien-2-yl}-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex32

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-[3-(2-phenylethyl)thien-2-yl]-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex33

2-{3-[(1*E*)-4-(2-Chlorophenyl)but-1-enyl]thien-2-yl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex34

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-[3-(4-phenylbutyl)thien-2-yl]-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex35

5-Hydroxy-2-{3-[(4-methoxybenzyl)oxy]phenyl}-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex36

2-{2-[(3,4-Dichlorobenzyl)oxy]phenyl}-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex37

2-(Furan-2-yl)-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex38

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-{3-[(*E*)-2-phenylethenyl]furan-2-yl}-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex39

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-(thien-3-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex40

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-[(trimethylsilyl)ethynyl]-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylate, Ex41

1-[2-(2-Chlorophenyl)ethyl]-5-hydroxy-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex42

1-Ethyl-5-hydroxy-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex43

1-Benzyl-5-hydroxy-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex44

5-Hydroxy-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1-(2,2,2-trifluoroethyl)-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, and Ex45

1-(4-Carboxybenzyl)-5-hydroxy-6-oxo-2-(thien-2-yl)-1,6-dihydropyridine-4-carboxylic acid. Ex46

8. (currently amended) A compound, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, selected from the group consisting of: ~~Example Nos. 47 to 49, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.~~

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-2-[3-([2-(1-naphthyl)ethyl]sulfonylamino)thien-2-yl]-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, Ex47

5-Hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-2-{3-[({[(2-phenyl-1,3-thiazol-4-yl)methyl]amino}carbonyl)amino]thien-2-yl}-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid, and Ex48

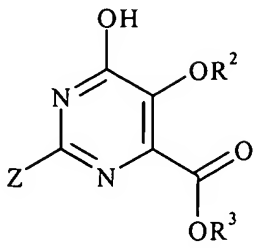
2-[3-({[(2-Chlorobenzyl)oxy]carbonyl}amino)thien-2-yl]-5-hydroxy-1-methyl-6-oxo-1,6-dihydropyrimidine-4-carboxylic acid. Ex49

9. (original) A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound of formula (I) as defined in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in association with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

10. (canceled)

11. (original) A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (I) as defined in claim 1, which comprises:

(A) reacting a compound of formula (XIV) with a compound of formula (XV):

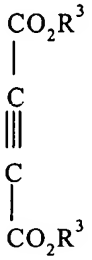


(XIV)

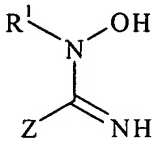
(XV)

wherein Z, R^1, R^2 and R^3 are as defined in claim 1, and L^1 represents a suitable leaving group; or

(B) reacting a compound of formula (XVIII) with a compound of formula (XIX):



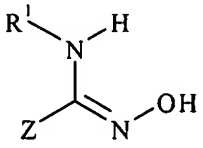
(XVIII)



(XIX)

wherein Z, R^1 and R^3 are as defined in claim 1; followed by cyclisation of the intermediate thereby obtained; or

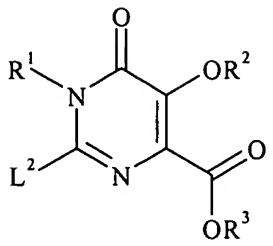
(C) reacting a compound of formula (XVIII) as defined above with a compound of formula (XX):



(XX)

wherein Z and R^1 are as defined in claim 1; followed by cyclisation of the intermediate thereby obtained; or

(D) reacting a compound of formula Z-$B(OH)_2$ with a compound of formula (XXII):



(XXII)

wherein Z, R^1, R^2 and R^3 are as defined in claim 1, and L^2 represents a suitable leaving group; in the presence of a transition metal catalyst; and

(E) subsequently, if required, converting a compound of formula (I) initially obtained into a further compound of formula (I) by standard methods.

12. (canceled)

13. (new) A method of inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase which comprises administering to a subject in need of such inhibition an effective amount of a compound of formula (I) as defined in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

14. (new) A method of treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, which comprises administering to a subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of a compound of formula (I) as defined in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.